



November 25, 2015

PSBA Victory

PSBA supports Keystone Exams bill, sent to the governor

On Monday, Nov. 23, the House of Representatives passed [Senate Bill 880](#) (Sen. Lloyd Smucker (R-Lancaster)), which places a two-year moratorium on using Keystone Exams as a graduation requirement. This is a tremendous victory and PSBA congratulates its active members for their advocacy in support of this legislation!

Senate Bill 880 was unanimously approved by the Senate in June and passed the House Education Committee last week with an amendment that requires the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) to investigate alternative methods for students to demonstrate proficiency for graduation and report its findings within six months.

Under new requirements, students in the class of 2017 must pass the Keystone Exams in algebra, literature, and biology, or an extensive project-based assessment, in order to graduate. Senate Bill 880 delays the implementation of the Keystone Exams as a graduation requirement or a benchmark for the need to participate in a project-based assessment until the 2018-2019 school year.

PSBA supported this bill and believes it is appropriate to take a step back from the requirement as the legislature considers a new school funding system as part of budget negotiations. Two additional years would allow time to implement new funding changes, as well as consider different approaches to assess the college and career readiness of students. It is the right time to more fully examine school funding inequities, how that impacts graduation requirements and what schools need in order to best prepare their students.

KEY VOTE

PSBA opposes property tax elimination: Vote fails in Senate

On Monday, Nov. 23, the Senate moved forward with a previous plan to hold a full Senate vote on a proposal to end the collection of school property taxes by replacing those dollars with other tax revenue. The language from [Senate Bill 76](#) was considered as an amendment to [House Bill 683](#), a bill to eliminate veterans' disability payments from income eligibility under the Property Tax Rent Rebate Program.

The language of Senate Bill 76 (Sen. Argall, R-Schuylkill) would eliminate school property taxes by increasing tax rates on income and sales and by broadening the base of services for which a sales tax would be applied. Under the plan, sales tax would increase to 7% and personal income tax would increase to 4.34%, up from 6% and 3.07% respectively.

The Senate vote Monday resulted in a very close 24-24 tie, with a negative vote from Lieutenant Governor Stack halting the legislation for now. Past attempts to move property tax elimination forward also failed by close numbers.

The Independent Fiscal Office, a nonpartisan state research agency that raised concerns on whether the plan would provide adequate replacement of the local share of education funding over time.

The property tax elimination plan is particularly concerning for school districts due to the current the overreliance on local property taxes to compensate for inequities in state education funding and the continually increasing cost of unfunded and underfunded mandates. Furthermore, it eliminates the ability of a school district to cover unpredictable costs, like building repairs or enrollment spikes, or meet additional obligations, like rising healthcare or PSERS expenses for school employees.



Budget impasse - Thanksgiving update

The "framework" is back on. After a significant bump in the road that led to short-lived threats of a veto override attempt Tuesday afternoon, Republican legislative leaders emerged from a meeting with Gov. Tom Wolf with fresh commitments to strive toward a final, negotiated state budget agreement. [Click here to read the article.](#)

Where to find the necessary revenue needed to fund the budget continues to be at the center of debate. Where to find the necessary revenue needed to fund the budget continues to be at the center of the debate. A major factor of the budget framework, the increase of a sales tax by 1.25% to subsidize property tax cuts, faltered. It is estimated that the increased sales tax would raise \$2 billion to reduce property taxes. However, House and Senate Republicans are opposed to this effort.

Governor Wolf gave a speech at the Pennsylvania Press Club on Monday in which he called on House and Senate majority members to move negotiations forward or deliver a new plan by the end of next week. Of major importance for public education in these discussions is the implementation of a new basic education funding formula, increased funding, pension reform and PlanCon reform for school construction reimbursement. Although PSBA agrees that the current over-reliance on local tax efforts to fund public education is unsustainable, property tax reform measures being considered, such as property tax elimination and referendum, would severely cripple school districts in years to come and must remain off of the budget table.

PSBA has been keeping a watch on how the extended budget stalemate is affecting Pennsylvania's public schools. [Click here to read about the negative impact no state funding is having across the commonwealth.](#)

Latest News

Senate Committee Action

- [Antihazing bill moves to the Senate](#)

Senate Committee Action

Antihazing bill moves to the Senate

[House Bill 1574](#) (Rep. Marsico, R- Dauphin) expands the Antihazing Law to require secondary schools to adopt policies and rules prohibiting students or other persons from engaging in any activity associated with an organization recognized by the school that can be described as hazing. This bill was approved by the House of Representatives on Nov. 17, 2015.

When the bill was voted out of the House Judiciary Committee earlier this month, Chairman Marsico noted that studies indicate 47 percent of all high school students experience hazing and 25 percent

report having been a victim through the age of 13. He called these statistics "deplorable" and asked members to support the bill.

House Bill 1574 amends the Antihazing Law to include secondary schools. A secondary school will be defined as any public or private school in the Commonwealth that provides instruction in grades 7 through 12 or any combination of those grades.

By expanding Pennsylvania's Antihazing Law to apply to public and private secondary schools, as well as organizations affiliated with our schools, we are taking one more step toward aggressively halting hazing. Penalties for violating school policies include imposition of fines, withholding of diplomas or transcripts, and the imposition of probation, suspension, dismissal or expulsion. The antihazing rules apply to acts conducted on or off campus or other school property.

The bill is now in the Senate Education Committee awaiting consideration. [Click here to read PSBA's letter of support for House Bill 1574.](#)

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